

This Week in Congress

January 11, 2010

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." As Congress returns to Washington, D.C., I welcome your input as to what the top priority should be for Congress in 2010. Please visit my [Web site](#) to vote in a poll posted on my home page. Any time you have suggestions on ways I can do my job better, please [let me know](#).

Don't Shut the American People Out of Health Care Reform

I am outraged by the decision of Democratic congressional leaders to hold closed door negotiations to finalize health care reform legislation. This decision is especially troubling because in these closed offices the future of health care for Kansans will be decided. Kansans and all Americans deserve to know what their representatives are voting on, and they deserve the assurance that their business will be conducted in a deliberate and open way.

President Obama stressed transparency and accountability in the health care debate. The CEO of C-SPAN, Brian Lamb, has called on Democratic leaders to honor the President's promise. Yet, transparency is nowhere to be found, as Democrats plan to skip a real, open conference process to negotiate differences in health care reform legislation and merge the bills behind closed doors.

Foreseeing this problem, in October, I joined Kansas Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins in sponsoring H.Res. 847, legislation insisting that any conference committee or meetings held to determine the final content of national health care legislation be conducted in public under the watchful eye of the American people. Americans deserve nothing less. I have also specifically asked Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi to allow C-SPAN to cover the negotiations. [Click here](#) to read more about this issue. [Click here](#) to learn more about my thoughts on health care reform.

Asking Kansas AG to Examine Constitutionality of Health Care Bill

This week, I requested Kansas Attorney General Steve Six examine the legal validity of health care reform legislation passed in the U.S. Senate on Christmas Eve. The personal handouts and political payoffs that led to passage of health care reform legislation in the Senate mean Kansans would be strapped with excessive burdens and costs to pay for the special treatment given to Nebraska and more than 10 other states.

Under the Senate-passed legislation, H.R. 3590, the federal government would pay for all new Medicaid enrollees in Nebraska. This special treatment given to Nebraska would cost federal taxpayers more than \$100 million over the next 10 years and make Nebraska the only state where the federal government would pay for all new Medicaid enrollees.

It is important that we determine whether this bill would violate the U.S. Constitution since it would levy significant taxes and mandate requirements that treat one state differently from all others in an arbitrary manner. I also asked Attorney General Six to determine whether Kansas could block the bill from being implemented should it become law. [Click here](#) to read more about my request.

[Click here](#)

to listen to some of my thoughts on health care during a recent interview with John Brennan on KWBW Radio in Hutchinson.

Learning More about Health Care Delivery in Kansas

The "Big First" Congressional District has 76 of our state's 126 community hospitals-the most hospitals of any congressional district in the nation. I have visited each of the 76 hospitals in the "Big First" and many of the remaining hospitals in Kansas. To date, I have been to 100 hospitals in our state. This week, I continued to learn more about the challenges of delivering health care in Kansas as I visited hospitals in Girard, Oswego, Iola and Burlington.

At each of the hospitals I visited, I met dedicated administrators, physicians, nurses and staff that work to provide area residents with the best care possible despite unique and significant challenges. As the health care reform debate continues in Congress, I will continue to advocate for Kansas hospitals and patients.

Thanks to all those who met with me during these visits, especially, Karen Wenzelburger and Kenny Boyd with Girard Medical Center in Girard; Freda Conard and Dan Hiben with Oswego Community Hospital in Oswego; Joyce Heismeyer with Allen County Hospital in Iola; and Dennis George with Coffey County Hospital in Burlington.

Thanking Kansas Guard Soldiers in Salina

On Saturday, I had the pleasure of joining nearly 300 Kansas Army National Guard soldiers of the 287th Sustainment Brigade at a steak feed in Salina. In September, these soldiers, headquartered in Wichita, returned after serving a year in Iraq where they played a key role in logistics and support operations.

The event was organized by the All American Beef Battalion. This nonprofit group was founded by Bill Broadie of Ashland, a cattle rancher and Vietnam veteran, as a way to support the troops fighting the war on terror while promoting American beef.

I thanked the soldiers for their service and for the opportunity to join them for a meal. I also commend Bill's efforts to make certain that today's service members understand our country's gratitude for their sacrifice-an appreciation regrettably not experienced by many of his fellow Vietnam veterans.

Services for Disabled Kansans are Essential

The Kansas Neurological Institute (KNI) in Topeka cares for nearly 160 disabled Kansans who live at the facility. Governor Parkinson and the Kansas Legislature are currently considering closing KNI. On Friday, I contacted Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services Secretary Don Jordan to express my support for the important services and training that KNI

and its dedicated personnel provide to the Kansans who live there.

Before making a decision, I asked Secretary Jordan to determine how any decision regarding KNI will affect federal funds distributed to Kansas for providing care to residents with mental and physical disabilities. I also asked Secretary Jordan to specifically demonstrate how the current KNI residents will be assured a safe home and proper medical care if the facility is closed.

KNI helps disabled Kansans live meaningful lives by promoting independence and teaching important life skills. We must be absolutely certain that a sustainable infrastructure is in place for disabled Kansans to have access to the essential services and care they need.

Speaking with Rotary Club Members

Whether in Pittsburg or Phillipsburg, members of civic clubs across our state provide leadership in their communities. As a member of the Hays Rotary Club, I enjoy visiting with fellow Rotarians in towns throughout Kansas. This week, I spoke to the Pittsburg Rotary Club, the Pittsburg Sunrise Rotary Club, the Frontenac Rotary Club and the Iola Rotary Club. The theme of my remarks was the need for fiscal restraint and responsibility. Since 2007, the federal deficit has increased from about \$160 billion to more than \$1.4 trillion last year. This reckless spending must be stopped if we are to leave things better for our children and grandchildren. Thanks to Kevin Mitchelson, Bobby Winters and Andy Mason of Pittsburg; Brian Gazaway of Frontenac; and Jon Dunbar of Iola.

Promoting Grocery Stores in Kansas Communities

Access to grocery stores and the healthy food they sell is critical for the viability of any community and the health of its residents. On Wednesday, I visited Ron's Supermarket in Pittsburg to learn more about this store that Ron and Barbara Rhodes opened in 1976. As Co-Chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I recently spoke at a House Hunger Caucus briefing on the importance of grocery stores to communities. Especially in rural communities, a grocery store is not only a place to purchase food and necessities close to home, but it also serves as a social institution for the town.

In Pittsburg, Ron's employs more than 80 workers and contributes about \$1.5 million in payroll to the community, benefiting the area economy. Ron's also has locations in Wichita and Missouri. Thanks to Blake Benson and the folks at Ron's for their hospitality.

Learning about Diabetes Education and Resource Center in Parsons

I visited Labette Health's Rector Diabetes Education and Resource Center in Parsons this week. Dedicated in November, the Rector Center aims to halt the spread of diabetes in Southeast Kansas and is the only center of its kind in a primarily rural area. The facility includes a library, classroom and demonstration kitchen where folks can learn about healthy eating and dietary habits. Jacque and Kelly Rector of Lawrence were the primary contributors of this unique and valuable community resource. I appreciated the chance to meet them and express appreciation for their generous commitment to improving the health of other Kansans.

Thanks to Labette Health CEO William Mahoney, Rector Center Medical Director Dr. Manish Dixit, Registered Dietitian Reno Jain, Rector Center Director Shellie Collins and Labette Health Foundation Executive Director Rod Landrum for their hospitality and work on this important issue.

Touring Coffeyville Resources Refining and Marketing

On Wednesday, I visited Coffeyville Resources Refining and Marketing in Coffeyville to learn more about the facility's operations. Coffeyville Resources Refining and Marketing operates an oil refinery that can produce 115,000 barrels per day. Its petroleum products are distributed throughout the Midwest. In 1984, Kansas had 13 refineries, today there are only three. We must create a business and environmental climate in the U.S. that will sustain this industry and allow it to grow.

While at the refinery, I visited with company leaders about current legislation in Congress, including cap and trade. At a time when businesses are struggling to keep workers employed, cap and trade would be damaging. Thanks to Kevan Vick, Executive Vice President and Fertilizer General Manager, and Robert Haugen, Executive Vice President of Refining Operations, for speaking with me during my visit.

Learning about Jobs at Chanute Manufacturing

Creating and protecting jobs in Kansas during these difficult economic times continues to be a top priority of mine. This week, I shared my thoughts about job creation opportunities in Kansas with the Director and President of Chanute's Chamber of Commerce while we toured Chanute Manufacturing. As a major state producer of power generation systems, Chanute Manufacturing employs hard working Kansans and has a substantial economic impact in the area. Thanks to Clint Isaac of Chanute Manufacturing for making this visit possible and to Scott Lewis, the owner of Chanute Manufacturing, for joining me.

Attending the Creighton vs. Wichita State Men's Basketball Game

On Saturday, Robba and I watched the Wichita State Shockers take on their rivals, the Creighton Blue Jays, at Koch Arena in Wichita. It was exciting to participate in the "Yellow Out." The Shockers did not disappoint their yellow-clad fans by handing Creighton a 70-58 defeat. Wichita State is having a successful basketball season thus far and Robba and I were

thankful for the opportunity to see this game. Special thanks to Wichita State President Donald Beggs and Andy Schlapp for arranging our visit.

Accepting Summer 2010 Internship Applications

I am now accepting applications for summer internships in my Washington, D.C., Hays, Hutchinson and Salina offices. Interns working in my offices will gain a better understanding of the legislative process, develop writing and communication skills and become better acquainted with Kansas leaders and organizations. Intern responsibilities include assisting me and my staff with legislative and administrative projects. Applications are due by Friday, March 5, 2010. Applicants should submit a completed application form, résumé, college transcript, three letters of reference and a cover letter explaining their interest in public service and goals of serving as an intern. [Click here](#) for more information on how to apply.

In the Office

Tanner Grubbs of Hays came by my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry